

Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

Two Nights

National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
Shenandoah National Park
Emergency: 1-800-732-0911



Big Meadows, Hawksbill, and Rose River

Standard - Circuit

Level: Strenuous Beginner

Total Length: 21 miles

Trip Description: Waterfalls and highest peak in the park, first night in Big Meadows Campground

Entry: 53 MP - Milam Gap

Exit: 53 MP - Milam Gap

Map(s): PATC #10 Central District

Day One

Campsite: Central District developed areas - campground or cabin

4 miles

Hike north on the Appalachian Trail (AT) about 2 miles.

Turn left onto Lewis Falls Trail and hike 1.8 miles.

Turn right to enter the Big Meadows area through the amphitheatre and follow your map to the campground office.

Camp at Big Meadows Campground (see note below).

(You may want to pick campsites near an AT spur trail.)

Day Two

Campsite: Rose River Loop - backcountry

8.6 to 9.1 miles (includes highest peak in Shenandoah National Park)

Return to the AT and hike north 3.8 miles.

Turn right onto Salamander Trail and hike to Hawksbill Summit, 0.9 mile.

Follow service road downhill about 0.6 mile.

Turn left onto Hawksbill Mountain Trail, 1.8 miles.

Turn right and walk along Skyline Drive less than 100 yards (crossing to get to post).

Turn left at the cement post and hike to the Skyland-Big Meadows Horse (SBMH) Trail.

Turn right onto SBMH and hike 2.9 miles to Rose River Loop Trail.

Turn left onto Rose River Loop Trail.

Camping: There are three possible places to look for flat spots to camp.

One area is before the falls upslope on the right/west.

The second is bearing left at the lower trail post (before the trail turns right and back up hill) and heading towards the confluence of Rose River and Hogcamp Branch

The third area is further down where a small feeder stream and Hogcamp Branch cross the trail. (By going downstream you will find places to camp.)

Day Three

6.7 miles (add one mile for side trip to Big Rock Falls)

The next day continue hiking on the Rose River Loop Trail to Rose River Fire Road (1 mile to 1.5 miles).

Be sure to look at Dark Hollow Falls just uphill from the trail and fire road junction.

Turn left onto Rose River Fire Road and hike downhill 0.9 mile.

Turn right onto Stony Mountain Trail and hike 1.1 miles.

Turn right onto Rapidan Fire Road and hike 1.7 miles.

Turn left onto Mill Prong Horse Trail (yellow-blazed), hiking 1 mile.

(You may wish to turn left and hike 1 mile roundtrip to Big Rock Falls.)

Turn right onto Mill Prong (blue-blazed) and hike 1 mile

Cross Skyline Drive to return to Milam Gap.

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Notes

Note: Big Meadows Campground is a popular campground, which often fills to capacity on weekends and holidays. Reservations are strongly recommended during the main camping season. During the spring (April to mid-May) the campground is first-come, first-served. If it is a beautiful, warm, sunny weekend, plan to arrive at the campground by 4:00 p.m. to get a campsite. All Shenandoah NP campgrounds are closed in the winter (generally from mid-November through March). See the campground section at www.nps.gov/shen for more information, or call 540-999-3500.

Options

Short route for day two, 3 to 3.5 miles

Return to the AT and hike north 1.6 miles.

Turn right onto Red Gate Fire Road and cross Skyline Drive 0.1 mile.

On other side of Skyline Drive pick up Rose River Fire Road .

Turn left almost immediately onto Rose River Loop/Skyland-Big Meadows Horse Trail.

In 0.9 mil, bear right to stay on Rose River Loop Trail.